

How Would Epicurus Analyze The Slogan "Live Free Or Die" As An Ethical Guide?

Post by "Cassius" of December 4, 2024 at 10:04 PM

We had several good conversations in our Wednesday night Zoom tonight, and one of them stemmed from a nearby discussion started by Kalosyni:

Post

[RE: Why Minimizing All Desire Is Incorrect \(And What To Do Instead\)](#)

Yes Joshua has in my mind quoted the best citation that can be raised in support of the proposition that all desires should be limited: ""If you wish," said he, "to make Pythocles rich, do not add to his store of money, but subtract from his desires."

And you can add in the statement about how when we are in no pain we have no need of pleasure.

BUT in response to those there are very many good arguments that those statements are contextual, and that life and pleasure are desirable, and those...



Cassius

December 4, 2024 at 7:52 PM

Rather than add this question to that thread, however, I think it's useful to consider this question separately because it does not just relate to natural vs necessary desires, it also requires us to consider explicitly the relationship between "mental" desires vs. "purely physical" desires.

(The state motto of New Hampshire, for those who aren't from the USA, is "Live Free or Die.")

How would Epicurus advise someone who was confronted with the choice that is contained in that slogan?

Let me say at the outset that I think a proper analysis of this question will consider the relationship between "physical" pleasures and "mental" pleasures. That's the way this relates to the "simple pleasures" question.

Some people will point out that it is very easy to obtain the natural and necessary "purely physical" desires which keep us alive, so we should not be concerned with "psychological desires" such as "being free,"

This is not an easy distinction to articulate, but one text that is potentially related is referenced by Torquatus in On Ends:

Quote from On Ends

XVII. The doctrine thus firmly established has corollaries which I will briefly expound.

(1) The Ends of Goods and Evils themselves, that is, pleasure and pain, are not open to mistake; where people go wrong is in not knowing what things are productive of pleasure and pain.

(2) Again, we aver that mental pleasures and pains arise out of bodily ones (and therefore I allow your contention that any Epicureans who think otherwise put themselves out of court; and I am aware that many do, though not those who can speak with authority); but although men do experience mental pleasure that is agreeable and mental pain that is annoying, yet both of these we assert arise out of and are based upon bodily sensations.

So with that as background, the question for discussion is: "How Would Epicurus Analyze The Slogan "Live Free Or Die"?" as an ethical guide?